

The Malacological Papers and Taxa of Martha Burton Woodhead Williamson, 1843-1922, and the Isaac Lea Chapter of the Agassiz Association

by

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Abstract. Martha Burton Woodhead Williamson, a turn-of-the-century amateur malacologist in southern California, was the author of several significant papers in malacology and marine biology and introduced 11 new names for mollusks. Ten of these names are available; one is a *nomen nudum*. Only two are currently regarded as being valid; the others are synonyms. Type material has been located in the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History for all but one of the available taxa. Williamson was secretary of the Isaac Lea Conchological Chapter of the Agassiz Association from 1893 to 1898. This small group, founded in 1888, appears to have been America's first independent malacological organization.

INTRODUCTION

Martha Burton Woodhead was born in Rothwell, near Leeds, Yorkshire, England, 6 March 1843, the daughter of Thomas and Virginia Burton Woodhead.¹ Her family moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, in spring 1844, where she attended public school. Her family then moved to Iowa, where she attended Miss Fish's private school, Elliot Seminary, and finally Burlington College, where she had a particular emphasis on philosophy.

During the Civil War, she served on a Christian Commission in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1882, she became associate editor of the *Terre Haute, Indiana, Enterprise*. She married Charles Wesley Williamson, a Civil War veteran, and they had three daughters.

When she and her family moved to Los Angeles in 1887, she became fascinated with marine life. She attended a class at the University of California Marine Biological

Laboratory at San Pedro in 1902 and studied biology at the University of Southern California in 1904.

She had a variety of interests and was active in a number of organizations, including the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the University Ethical Club, and the Historical Society of Southern California. She was vice president of the latter for 20 years, writing a number of articles for its publication. Williamson was also the second president of the Southern California Press Club. She wrote many articles on a variety of subjects in a number of magazines, including several in the *Sunday Illustrated Magazine* of the *Los Angeles Times*. Some of her popular articles were published under at least four pen names, particularly "Virginia Burton," and one of her mollusk articles was by "Martha Burton" (WILLIAMSON, 1890a). (I have not attempted to track down all of her popular newspaper and magazine articles on shells, but I have listed those I encountered among archival materials.)

She died on 18 March 1922, at the age of 79. She was described as having been "petite, graceful and scholarly" (Figures 1, 2).

Mrs. Williamson wrote many papers on mollusks and marine biology, most in *The Nautilus*. Particularly significant was a list of the mollusks of San Pedro (WILLIAMSON, 1892b), which contained descriptions of two new taxa by

¹ The information about Williamson's life was obtained from ANONYMOUS (1922), the other newspaper articles mentioned with it in the Literature Cited, and from a holographic autobiography by Williamson in the S. S. Berry archives at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Some correspondence to her is housed in the Special Collections and University Archives at Stanford University (KEEN, 1982).



Figure 1

Martha Burton Williamson (from BROWN, 1894).

W. H. Dall, the first published figures of a number of Californian species, the introduction of six new names of her own, and notes based on correspondence from J. G. Cooper, C. T. Simpson, and R. E. C. Stearns. Other important papers included several on California abalones (WILLIAMSON, 1894g, 1906b, 1907, 1908), an anatomical monograph on "*Pecten aquisulcatus*" (WILLIAMSON, 1902b), and a discussion of the West Coast Mitridae (WILLIAMSON, 1906c).

She introduced 11 new names for mollusks. One is a *nomen nudum*; the rest are available. Type material has been isolated in the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, repository of her collection, for 10 of the available taxa. Only two of these taxa are currently regarded as being valid, both species of *Crepidula*.

The first national organization in the United States devoted to the study of mollusks appears to have been in the Isaac Lea Chapter of the Agassiz Association. The Agassiz Association, founded in 1875, was a popular natural history organization in the 1880s and 1890s. The history of its Isaac Lea Chapter is discussed by WILLIAMSON (1894e).

Walter Harrison of Fisher's Island, New York, an Agassiz Association member, decided in early 1887 that a nationwide malacological society was needed. He wrote to Harlan H. Ballard, Agassiz Association president, who gave him encouragement. Later that year, Dr. M. L. Leach of Michigan had a similar idea and wrote to Harrison.



Figure 2

Martha Burton Williamson (after ANONYMOUS, 1922).

The result was that on 8 February 1888, Ballard certified the Isaac Lea Chapter of the Agassiz Association, to be a national correspondence group devoted to malacology, with Leach as its president and Harrison as secretary, and two other members. Several more joined in 1888 and 1889. Thus, this group predates the American Association of Conchologists (1890–1892) by two years (concerning the latter, see KEEN, 1982, and ABBOTT, 1987:xii–xiii), and its existence was discussed in *The Nautilus* at the time the American Association was started (LEACH, 1890; see also LEACH, 1894). The chapter never reached the 181 members of the Association, but it survived much longer (1888–1899).

Reports were required from each member at least once a year, and these were bound together in manuscript "Transactions," but lack of funds prevented their publication. Instead, papers and the annual Transactions were circulated by mail, from member to member.

By 1893, Josiah Keep was president,² and Williamson was secretary, a position she retained until 1898. The group, now called the Isaac Lea Conchological Chapter, was divided into sections—for example, fossil shells and marine shells of the east coast—each with its own section secretary. There were 26 members, including nine juveniles. Dues were 50 cents a year (25 cents for children). Wrote Williamson, "From the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans and in Canada our members are collecting and studying land, fresh-water and marine Mollusca" (Williamson, 1894e).

² Four papers by Keep were unearthed in the course of study that were not in my bibliography for him (COAN, 1985). These were KEEP & WILLIAMSON (1895), listed in the Literature Cited, plus the following:

1893a. The Museum of Amherst College. . . In: WILLIAMSON (1893g).

1893b. Conchological notes. In: WILLIAMSON (1893i).

1895. How I became a conchologist. *The Observer* 6(4):63–64 (April).

On 28 July 1893, the organization held its first meeting, this in Los Angeles, California (WILLIAMSON, 1893f).

From 1893 to 1898, periodic reports of the Isaac Lea Conchological Chapter were published sequentially in three different periodicals, with Williamson as their editor. The five five appeared in *Popular Science News* (WILLIAMSON, 1893d-g, i). The reports then appeared in *The Observer*, journal of the Agassiz Association (WILLIAMSON, 1894a, c, e, f, h; KEEP & WILLIAMSON, 1895). Finally, the reports moved to *The Nautilus* (WILLIAMSON, 1895a-e, 1896a-l, 1897a-h, 1898a). (Most of these last reports edited by Williamson have no original material by her and are entirely excerpts from papers from the 'Transactions'.)

By 1895, the chapter claimed 40 members, including 16 juveniles. Reports from members were still bound into a manuscript volume: "The annual reports of the members for the year 1894 form Volume VI of 'The Transactions' of the chapter. The vol. is unusually interesting, and many papers are of scientific value. Photographs and water colors add to the beauty of the book, and it is to be regretted that we cannot have the transactions published" (KEEP & WILLIAMSON, 1895).

In January 1898, Dr. William S. Strode took over as general secretary, and a few reports appeared in *The Nautilus* (STRODE, 1898, 1899a-d). After the last of these, the organization seems to have slipped quietly from the malacological scene. In contrast, the Wilson Ornithological Society began in 1888 as a chapter of the Agassiz Association, becoming independent in 1902.

LIST OF TAXA

The following list includes the taxa that Williamson introduced. Each original combination is followed by the original reference (keyed to the Literature Cited). This is followed by type locality, information about type material, and remarks about current allocation. The Literature Cited provides references for Williamson's taxa and any senior homonyms of these taxa, but not for their senior or junior synonyms; references for papers on mollusks and marine biology not containing new taxa are also included.

alba, *Olivella biplicata* var.—WILLIAMSON, 1892b:212 [*nomen nudum*; non *Oliva alba* MARRAT, 1871:32; pl. 22, fig. 390, an *Olivella*].

San Pedro, Los Angeles Co., Calif.

Remarks: Synonym of *Olivella biplicata* (Sowerby, 1825), according to BURCH (1959:19).

brunnea, *Olivella biplicata* var.—WILLIAMSON, 1892b:212.

San Pedro, Los Angeles Co., Calif.

Type material: not located.

Remarks: Synonym of *Olivella biplicata* (Sowerby, 1825), according to BURCH (1959:19).

elongata, *Nassa mendica* var.—WILLIAMSON, 1892b:213, *ex* Stearns MS; WILLIAMSON, 1905b:123 [*non Nassarius elongatus* (SOWERBY, 1815:15-16; pl. 110, fig. 1)].

Santa Catalina Id., Los Angeles Co., Calif.

Type material: LACM 2207, syntypes (16).

Remarks: Synonym of *Nassarius mendicus* (Gould, 1850).

Her initial description, though meager, is sufficient to make the name available, in spite of her statement to the contrary in 1905. Her second account suggests that there may have been only one original specimen, in which case additional material was later added to the type lot.

maculata, *Drillia moesta* var.—WILLIAMSON, 1905b:122-123.

Pt. Fermin, Los Angeles Co., Calif.; 3 specimens, only one of which was retained in her collection.

Type material: LACM 1052, lectotype (SPHON, 1971:19).

Remarks: Synonym of *Pseudomelatoma penicillata* (Carpenter, 1864), according to KEEN (1971:690).

naticarum, *Crepidula rugosa* var.—WILLIAMSON, 1905a:50; WILLIAMSON, 1905b:127.

San Pedro, Los Angeles Co., Calif.; at least 4 specimens, one on a piece of *Polinices lewisii* (Gould, 1847).

Type material: LACM 1026, syntypes (2).

Remarks: *Crepidula naticarum* Williamson, 1905, according to HOAGLAND (1977:383, 387; fig. 18), who considered it an older name for *Crepidula coei* Berry, 1950.

norrissiarum, *Crepidula rugosa* var.—WILLIAMSON, 1905a:51; WILLIAMSON, 1905b:127 [misspelled as "*morrisiarum*"].

San Pedro, Los Angeles Co., Calif.; on *Norrissia norrisii* (Sowerby, 1838).

Type material: LACM 1027, syntypes (4).

Remarks: *Crepidula norrissiarum* Williamson, 1905, according to HOAGLAND (1977:383-384, 387; fig. 17).

parvum, *Calliostoma canaliculatum* var.—Williamson, 1905b:128.

San Diego Bay, San Diego Co., Calif.; F. W. Kelsey.

Type material: LACM 2206, syntypes (10).

Remarks: Synonym of *C. canaliculatum* (Lightfoot, 1786).

purpureus, *Heterodonax bimaculatus* var.—Williamson, 1892b:187.

San Pedro, Los Angeles Co., Calif.

Type material: LACM 1168, lectotype (COAN, 1973:46; fig. 12); LACM 1176, paralectotypes (8 pairs, 2 valves).

Remarks: Synonym of *H. pacificus* (Conrad, 1837) (COAN, 1973).

rosea, *Corbula luteola* var.—WILLIAMSON, 1905b:120 [*non* REEVE, 1844:pl. 4, fig. 26].

Terminal Id., San Pedro, Calif.; valve on a sea anemone in a rock pool on the old breakwater.

Type material: LACM 1421, syntypes, 2 valves.

Remarks: Synonym of *C. luteola* Carpenter, 1864, according to BERNARD (1983:58). Apparently, a second valve was added to the type lot at a later date.

salmoneus, *Heterodonax bimaculatus* var.—WILLIAMSON, 1892b:187.

San Pedro, Los Angeles Co., Calif.

Type material: LACM 1169, lectotype (COAN, 1973: 47; fig. 13); LACM 1177, paralectotypes (1 pair, 21 valves).

Remarks: Synonym of *H. pacificus* (Conrad, 1837) (COAN, 1973).

splendidula, *Haliotis cracherodii* var.—WILLIAMSON, 1892b: 198; WILLIAMSON, 1905b:128–129.

Pt. Vicente, Los Angeles Co., Calif.; a number of specimens; 1890.

Type material: LACM 1035, lectotype (SPHON, 1971: 12).

Remarks: Synonym of *H. cracherodii* Leach, 1814, according to ABBOTT (1974:17). The name was made available in 1892; in 1905, she indicated that it had been *ex* Dall MS.

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